The Castles and Keeps of Scotland

Being a description of sundry fortresses, towers, peels, and other houses of strength built by the princes and barons of old time in the highlands, islands, inlands, and borders of the ancient and godfearing kingdom of Scotland

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Illustrated



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CHAPTER VII

THE SHIRES OF STIRLING AND PERTH

Stirling Castle

THE Castle of Stirling stands upon one of those isolated outpourings of trappean rock which have made so much history for Scotland by their excellence as sites for fortifications. Like Dumbarton and Edinburgh Castles, it has in all ages commanded the low country at its base, and been one of the great fortresses on which the safety of the kingdom depended. Even more than either of the others, Stirling has been the key of Scotland. It stands athwart the natural road from the Highlands to the Lowlands, and under its walls has ever passed all the traffic between north and south. It commands the windings of the Forth, and under it stood for centuries the only bridge across the river. Below Stirling, until within recent times, there were no ferries across the river; above, though fords may be found, they are in a mountainous and difficult country, im-

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practicable for ordinary travel, and also far out of the usual road of those who would fare between north and south Scotland. Consequently Stirling was, during the greater portion of Scotland's history, the key to the Highlands, and its possession, carrying with it the control of the passages of the river, was indispensable to him who would have the mastery of the kingdom. It was naturally a strong place, rising precipitously two hundred and twenty feet from the level plain of the Forth, and its natural defences were augmented on every side by artificial strengths of ditch and wall.

The Castlehill of Stirling is strikingly similar in external aspect to the Acropolis of Athens, and the Castlehill of Edinburgh, to the latter of which it is in every respect geologically similar. It rises in a moderate slope from southeast to northwest, ending in a tremendous and abrupt precipice. The ancient town clustered along the two or three streets which follow the backbone of the hill, and open into the esplanade which lies before the castle. From the upper end of this we enter the structure by the drawbridge, passing through a double gate, formerly defended by portcullis and double ditch. This portion of the defences

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is comparatively modern, dating only from Queen Anne's time. The eastern battery, commanding the Forth Bridge, was erected by Mary of Lorraine and is called the French Battery, because built by French engineers. The only similar one in Scotland is at Berwick-on-Tweed.

Before us is now the earlier entrance gateway, flanked by two round towers, which dates from the time of James III. Passing this we find ourselves in the outer courtyard. To the right is the palace, curiously adorned on the outside with rude statues and gargoyles. These are the earliest Renaissance sculptures in Scotland, done by French sculptors brought over by James V after his residence and marriage in France. The architecture is a curious medley of Gothic and Renaissance. The figures on the east side represent deities and mythological personages, those on the south side are soldiers, while the northern ones are perhaps the most interesting, including statues of James V and his daughter Mary, and Cleopatra with the asp. This palace was begun by James V and completed by his daughter, though it was never made as large as was planned, by reason of the western tier of rooms not having been added, though a corri-

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dor exists from which they were to have been entered. Within the block is a courtyard called the Lions' Den, because James IV is said to have kept his lions here. The square tower on the southwest is much older than the palace, being a guard tower of the original wall. The palace is now occupied for military purposes, and inaccessible to visitors.

Passing under an arch at the north end, we enter the inner court. On the east is the Parliament Hall, pure late Gothic, and older than the palace or any of the buildings of the inner court. This was probably built by James III. It contains what was originally a noble hall with timbered roof, one hundred and twenty-five feet long. It has now been cut up into numerous floors and apartments, to serve the purpose of a barracks. On the north side is the Chapel Royal, built on the site of an earlier collegiate church by James VI for the baptism of his son, Prince Henry. It is now sadly mutilated by internal changes. Part of it is used as an armoury. The buildings on the west are modern, but occupy the site of the earliest royal residence, that of James II, and perhaps contain some of the original walls. One of the rooms, the principal one in the castle which may be seen by visitors, is called

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the Douglas Room, and is popularly supposed to be the identical chamber where James II assassinated the Earl of Douglas. This haughty nobleman, then in league with the Earls of Ross and Crawford, was induced in 1452, by promises of safe-conduct, to enter the castle and take supper with the king. After the meal the king took him aside and urged him to withdraw from the league. His uncompromising refusal so angered the king that he immediately drew his dagger and plunged it into the Earl's heart. The poet thus pictures the Douglas's refusal:

"'No, by the cross it may not be;
I've pledged my knightly word,'
And like a thunder-cloud he scowled,
And half unsheathed his sword.
Then drew the king that jewelled glaive,
Which gore so oft had spilt
And in the haughty Douglas' heart
He sheathed it to the hilt."

The Douglas Room contains a miscellaneous assortment of relics, of more curiosity than value. The visit is apt to be disappointing, as the room was devastated by fire a few years ago, and the panelling is mostly modern.

What will well repay the most hardened

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sightseer, however, is to climb to the battlements at the eastern side of the Douglas garden, and slowly survey the view from their whole length. There is no fairer prospect in the whole of Scotland, and I know of but three or four in Europe which in my opinion can equal it, — the Bosphorus from the Galata Tower at Constantinople, the plain of Attica from Lycabettos, the east coast of Sicily from Taormina.

The foreground of the view from Stirling Castle is everywhere formed by the rich alluvial plain, abundantly fertile, and sprinkled with village, wood and farm. Its monotony is broken at short distances by half a dozen bold masses of trap rock, well disposed to adorn the landscape. Not too far away for good scenic effect, on the north and south respectively, rise the green and softly rounded slopes of the Lennox and Ochil hills. To the east curve interminably the famous windings of the Forth, leading the eye gradually to the blue firth and the distant Lothians, dominated by Arthur's Seat. On the northwest and the west our eye ranges over the valleys of the Allan, the Teith and the Forth, above which rise the distant peaks of the southern Highlands. The eye never tires of gazing at this

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diversified loveliness, and it has called forth the admiration of more than one author. "Who," says Macculloch, "does not know Stirling's noble rock, rising the monarch of the landscape, its majestic and picturesque towers, its amphitheatre of mountain, and the windings of its marvellous river; and who that has once seen the sun descending here in all the blaze of its beauty beyond the purple hills of the west, can ever forget the plain of Stirling, the endless charm of this wonderful scene, the wealth, the splendour, the variety, the majesty, of all which here lies between earth and heaven?"

For a while withdrawing our gaze from the distant landscape, we shall find in nearer objects much to interest us. To the east lies a rocky mass, called Gowlan Hill, now partly occupied by cemeteries. Here were formerly to be seen the ramparts thrown up by Prince Charles Edward in 1746, when he besieged the castle. This low ridge stretches away to the north, where it ends near the bridge in the Moat Hill, the feudal place of justice, where executions formerly took place. On this hill, in sight of the towers of their own castle of Doune, and their own fair hills and farms, died by the axe in 1425 Duncan, the old Earl of

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Lennox, his son-in-law, the Regent Murdoch, Duke of Albany, and Walter and Alexander Stuart, the latter's sons. At an earlier date Sir Robert Graham and his associates were executed here for the murder of James I. The popular name of this mount is Hurley-Haaky (*haaky* being an old Scotch word for cow, and *hurley* the amusement of coasting), because James V used to coast down the steep slope on a cow's skull.

Between these hills and the ramparts of the castle a steep road or pass comes up from the houses below, and leads to a point where formerly was a large gateway in the castle wall. Opposite this in the inner wall is a low-arched sallyport, known as the "Laird of Ballangleich's entry," and said to have once been the main entrance of the castle. This path was anciently of much importance and was known as the road of Ballangleich, meaning the windy pass, a name which is still abundantly justified. This name furnished an incognito to James V who, as the Laird of Ballangleich, was wont to make many a surreptitious excursion on errands of gallantry or curiosity which frequently led him to adventures similar to those of Haroun al Raschid.

Passing to the other side of the ramparts,

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we may note, carved in the stone, the initials M. R., Mary Regina. The place is known as Queen Mary's Lookout, and verily she could have found no better spot from which to survey the beauties of her kingdom.

In the valley below lies what was formerly known as the King's Park, and long stretches of its enclosing wall still exist. It was formerly wooded and full of deer kept for the royal hunts. At the east end were the royal gardens. Though the flower beds and fruit trees have long since disappeared, the terraces and mounds on which they stood are clearly visible. In the centre of these paths and mounds rises an octagonal mound of some size, flat on top, known as the King's Knot. This is of great antiquity, and is said to have been the scene of court festivities of various kinds. Presumably it was a place for knightly reunions, for it was called the Round Table as early as the time of Bannockburn, when Edward of England was told by Moubray, the governor, not to expect safety by being admitted to the castle, and so "took the way beneath the castle by the Round table."

Like Edinburgh and Dumbarton, Stirling Castle Rock has been a fortress since times so ancient that its founders are forgotten. The

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Romans recognized its strength, and Agricola placed a garrison here, while his successors found it very useful in overawing the northern tribes. The Roman military road from south to north passed through here, and persisted much longer than their dominion. After Roman times, Stirling was a prize to be contended for by belligerent tribes. In the ninth century, the Northumbrians added much of the territory of Scotland to their own, either by conquest or treaty, and Stirling was included. They rebuilt the castle, and under protection of its garrison, bridged the Forth with a stone structure which was adorned with a cross and the motto, part of which is borne on the ancient seal of the burgh, —

"Anglos a Scotis separat crux ista remotis.
Hic armis Bruti: Scoti stant hic cruce tuti."

The castle at this remote period, however, was probably nothing but a rude and small tower, and as such it appears in the seal of the burgh. Even if the Scots did temporarily lose possession of the hill, they soon regained it again, and made common cause with the Saxons against the Danes.

In the tenth century, learning of a Danish invasion, Kenneth III appointed Stirling

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Castle as a place of rendezvous for his barons, and marched from it to the victorious field of Luncarty. Two centuries later William the Lion was captured by the English during an unsuccessful expedition across the border, and to secure the ransom which was promised for his deliverance, the four principal fortresses of the kingdom, Stirling, Edinburgh, Roxburgh and Berwick, were impignorated to the English. This was the first time English troops held any important part of Scotch territory, and occurred during the reign of Henry II. His son, the generous Richard Cœur de Lion, freely forgave, at his accession, the unpaid instalments of the ransom, withdrew his troops from Scotch soil, and renounced all claims he had upon the kingdom. William the Lion afterwards held some of his parliaments here, and here occurred his death in 1212. Alexander II here had enacted several important statutes, notably that establishing trial by jury. John Baliol also convoked parliament in Stirling Castle, and from here in 1295 wrote to the King of France, asking for a French princess to marry to his son.

In 1296, when Edward I overran Scotland, the garrison of Stirling deserted it without

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offering resistance. The next year the English were repulsed on the field of Stirling; the garrison which they left in the castle speedily surrendered to Sir William Wallace, who dismantled and destroyed it after the battle of Falkirk. Edward II repaired it and held it for a year, when the Scots again captured it. In 1300 Sir William Oliphant defended it for three months, but was finally obliged to capitulate to the English, who held it three years. Then it was retaken, and Oliphant again assumed the governorship. He maintained the castle against Edward when all of Scotland was at his feet, and all the resources of the king, who besieged the castle in person for three months, seemed inadequate to force its surrender. The king called a council at St. Andrews and obliged the assembled barons of England and Scotland to pronounce sentence of outlawry on Sir William Wallace, Sir Simon Frazer, and the garrison of Stirling Castle. When at last necessity forced the garrison to offer to capitulate, the king was so incensed that he refused the offer, and finally took the place by storm. The garrison was distributed among various English jails, and the governor sent to the Tower of London.

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For a long time the castle was now held by the English, who were masters of most of Scotland. Though besieged several times by Bruce, it was not taken until 1339.

When the Stuart kings succeeded to the throne, Stirling Castle became one of their favourite places of residence, and to them it owes its present form, as we have seen. James II was born and brought up here, and here he perpetrated the abominable treachery of the murder of the Earl of Douglas. James III, a mild-mannered monarch wholly out of sympathy with the turbulent manners of his age, here secluded himself from his nobles, and surrounded himself with favourites. After his death on the field of Sauchie, his son ascended the throne, and often resided here during Lent that he might do penance in the Franciscan church for his share in the death of his father. James V was born and crowned in Stirling, and popular tradition has made it the scene of many gallant or amusing adventures of the "Laird of Ballangleich."

In 1543, Queen Mary was crowned here when scarcely nine months old, and the fortress was her residence for many years. Her son James was brought hither soon after his birth in Edinburgh Castle and baptized in the

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Chapel Royal on December 15, 1566. When Mary was forced to sign her resignation of the crown, in the following year, he was crowned here, and spent his boyhood in the castle. He convoked his first parliament in the great hall, which so incensed his friends that it nearly provoked a civil war. In spite of all opposition, he continued to live here much of the time.

The castle was besieged and taken by General Monk in 1651, and Scotland suffered severe and irreparable loss, for he removed the national archives, which were here for safe keeping, to the Tower of London. There they remained for years, and when they were shipped back by sea, a storm overwhelmed the vessel which was carrying them, and they were for ever lost. The castle played a part in 1689, and 1715, and was besieged in 1746 by Charles Edward, who might have taken it if he had not been forced to retreat by the arrival of the Duke of Cumberland.

Doune in Menteith

The Castle of Doune, one of the best preserved ruins of a feudal fortress at present existing in Scotland, stands on a mound, prob-

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